

NAVAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE COMMAND

Fact Sheet

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Historical Incidence of Suicide in the Department of the Navy

**Prepared for the**  
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## Historical Incidence of Suicide in the Department of the Navy

### Definitions:

A “completed suicide” refers to suicides resulting in death and excludes suicide attempts where the victim survived.

A “crude suicide rate” refers to a suicide rate based on crude data and/or nonstandard statistical models.

### World War I and Interwar Era

Completed Suicide Rates <sup>1</sup>	
Year	Incidents per 1,000
1916	30
1917	19
1918	15
1919	17
1920	22
1921	21
1922	18
1923	30
1924	30
1925	23
1926	18
1927	38
1928	30
1929	25
1930	27
1931	26
1932	17
1933	39
1934	28
1935	32
1936	23
1937	26
1938	21
1939	21
1940	20

## World War II

Data on suicides or suspected suicides in the World War II era was often hidden in the method of death or more broadly under mental conditions.

The data for the 1942–1945 period indicated that a total of 646 noncombat deaths were due to mental conditions. Of those, 76 were attributed to drowning; 106, to strangulation; 373, to gunshot wounds; 18, to lacerations or puncture wounds; and 73, to poisoning. While it is not obvious that every Navy combat death assigned to mental conditions was suicide, it could be surmised that a reference to a mental condition as a secondary cause to drowning, strangulation, or gunshot wound was indicative of a suicide.<sup>2</sup>

## Korean War

No data found.

## Vietnam Era

The Naval Health Research Center reported that between July 1965 and January 1972 the overall suicide rate for enlisted men in the Navy was 8 per 100,000 and for officers, 9 per 100,000.<sup>3</sup> The same source stated that the rate of “completed suicide” between 1966 and 1977 was 7.2 per 100,000 and between 1974 and 1985, 6.59 per 100,000.<sup>4</sup>

<b>A Comparison of Navy and Marine Corps Completed Suicide Rates for Officers and Enlisted, 1966–1977<sup>5</sup></b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000 for Navy Male Officer and Enlisted Personnel</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000 for USMC Officer and Enlisted Personnel</b>
<b>1966</b>	6.07	16.29
<b>1967</b>	9.26	16.28
<b>1968</b>	8.04	11.10
<b>1969</b>	8.63	23.04
<b>1970</b>	8.28	14.38
<b>1971</b>	4.69	9.84
<b>1972</b>	2.91	16.74
<b>1973</b>	6.05	18.01
<b>1974</b>	8.26	14.70
<b>1975</b>	6.58	13.41
<b>1976</b>	7.67	12.54
<b>1977</b>	9.58	13.19
<b>Yearly Average</b>	7.22	15.21

<b>Pay Grade/Rank Distribution for Navy and Marine Corps Completed Suicides, 1966–1977<sup>6</sup></b>				
<b>Pay Grade</b>	<b>Navy</b>		<b>Marine Corps</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000</b>
<b>E-1 through E-3</b>	159	5.98	236	16.73
<b>E-4 through E-6</b>	256	7.17	140	15.15
<b>E-7 through E-9</b>	65	11.24	21	13.00
<b>All Enlisted</b>	480	7.35	397	15.40

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Navy</b>		<b>Marine Corps</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000</b>
<b>Warrant Officer</b>	4	8.84	2	12.64
<b>O-1 through O-3</b>	32	6.54	18	10.93
<b>O-4 through O-6</b>	21	6.77	7	10.56
<b>All Officers</b>	57	6.75	27	10.94

### **Post-Vietnam/Late 20th Century**

The total number of suicides in active duty enlisted Navy personnel was 373 for the period 1974–1985. On average, 32 cases occurred per year, a rate of 5.59 per 100,000.<sup>7</sup>

<b>Active Duty Enlisted Personnel<sup>8</sup></b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000</b>
<b>1974</b>	8.60
<b>1975</b>	7.71
<b>1976</b>	3.49
<b>1977</b>	5.28
<b>1978</b>	4.59
<b>1979</b>	5.70
<b>1980</b>	6.34
<b>1981</b>	6.00
<b>1982</b>	6.52
<b>1983</b>	9.58
<b>1984</b>	7.45
<b>1985</b>	7.40

Overall, for the period 1974–1984 the suicide incident rate was 6.85 per 100,000 for men and 3.20 per 100,000 for women.<sup>9</sup>

<b>Male Data Only, Active Duty Enlisted Navy Personnel<sup>10</sup></b>	
<b>Race</b>	<b>Incidents per 100,000</b>
<b>White</b>	7.26
<b>Black</b>	5.00
<b>Other</b>	4.42

Note: In the Navy, the 1980 to 1992 mortality rate for completed suicide was 11 per 100,000 active duty personnel.<sup>11</sup>

### **1990–1995**

The crude suicide rate for the Navy for the year 1995 was 15.6 cases per 100,000; the comparable civilian rate was 13.74 per 100,000.<sup>12</sup>

### **1999–2001**

From 1999 through 2001, 200 cases of completed suicide were identified in the Navy and Marine Corps.<sup>13</sup>

<b>Navy and Marine Corps Completed Suicide Rates per 100,000, 1991–2001<sup>14</sup></b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Navy</b>	<b>USMC</b>
<b>1999</b>	11.0	15
<b>2000</b>	11.7	13.9
<b>2001</b>	10.4	16.2

Note: Across the three-year period the rate averaged 10.6 for Navy personnel and 14.4 for Marine personnel compared to the national U.S. average of 10.5.

<b>Average Suicide Rates by Gender, Race, and Rank, 1999–2001<sup>15</sup></b>		
	<b>Navy</b>	<b>USMC</b>
<b>Total</b>	10.6	14.4
<b>Male</b>	12.0	14.6
<b>Female</b>	2.5	12.4
<b>White</b>	10.8	15.0
<b>Black</b>	10.8	14.5
<b>All Other</b>	9.0	11.3
<b>Officer</b>	5.5	10.6
<b>Enlisted</b>	11.5	14.9

## 1999–2007

Between 1999 and 2007, 365 completed suicides occurred among active duty Navy personnel and 250 among active duty Marines. Completed rates were often lower than the overall U.S. annual suicide rate for the period, which averaged 12.66 per 100,000 for the years 1999 to 2007.<sup>16</sup>

Navy and Marine Corps Completed Suicide Rates per 100,000 by Demographics <sup>17</sup>		
Demographic	USN	USMC
Total	11.0	14.4
Male	11.9	15.4
Female	4.1	6.9
White	12.2	15.9
Black	7.9	10.0
Asian/Pac Island	9.5	21.2
Native American	23.9	4.3
Hispanic	8.0	6.3
Other/Unknown	10.2	23.6
Officer	6.6	9.9
Enlisted	11.7	15.6
<b>Overall U.S. Suicide Rate, 1999–2007: approximately 12.66 per 100,000</b>		
Note: Military figures are calculated using end strengths from personnel data. Rates are standardized using the total Department of the Navy population proportions for gender, age, and race/ethnicity. Navy and Marine Corps rates are also standardized for officer/enlisted status.		

## 2009

The suicide rate per 100,000 active duty Navy personnel in 2009 was 13.8 (48 actual suicides). By comparison, the Army rate was 23.0 (160 actual suicides); the Marine Corps, 24.0 (52 actual suicides); and the Air Force, 12.5 (41 actual suicides).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Medical Department, U.S. Navy, *The History of the Medical Department of the United States Navy in World War II: The Statistics of Diseases and Injuries*, Vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1950), 157–58.

<sup>3</sup> Naval Health Research Center, Report No. 97-30, “A Demographic Analysis of Suicide Among Naval Personnel,” DTIC, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a335283.pdf>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Naval Health Research Center, “Completed Suicide in the Navy and Marine Corps,” Report No. 82-17, DTIC, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a124170.pdf>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Naval Health Research Center, Suicides in Active Duty Enlisted Navy Personnel, Report No. 89-34, DTIC, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a219287.pdf>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Naval Health Research Center, Report No. 97-30, “A Demographic Analysis of Suicide Among Naval Personnel,” DTIC, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a335283.pdf>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Suicide Statistics at a Glance, <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/suicide/statistics/trends01.html>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Naval Health Research Center, “Surveillance of Completed Suicide in the Department of the Navy,” Report No. 03-05, DTIC, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a432139.pdf>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Naval Health and Research Center, “Department of the Navy Suicide Incident Report (DONSIR): Summary of Findings, 1999–2007,” Report No. 09-15, DTIC, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a515110.pdf>, accessed 8 August 2012; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Suicide Statistics at a Glance, <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/suicide/statistics/trends01.html>, accessed 8 August 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>18</sup> Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Indra Bosko, "Suicide Prevention Symposium Brings Experts, Military Together," 02/01/2011, [http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story\\_id=58320](http://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=58320), accessed 8 August 2012.